

Hospitality Risk

What the Vegas Shooting Means for Hotel Security

Hospitality may eventually be compelled to adopt airport-style security measures, but for now training is key to prevention.

By: Katie Siegel (<http://riskandinsurance.com/author/katie-siegel/>) | October 19, 2017 • 6 min read

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Movie theaters, schools, nightclubs, work functions... these are places where no one expects violence to break out, but where mass shooters chose to carry out their crimes. With the shooting in Las Vegas, executed from a suite in the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, the hotel industry now joins that list.

The hospitality sector has long been acknowledged as a soft target, relatively unprotected from shootings, terror attacks and other types of violence. To some degree, that's not likely to change. Hotels face unique challenges in crafting security plans. They need to have enough visible

security to make guests feel safe, but not alarmed. They need to identify and investigate suspicious behavior while respecting patrons' privacy.

“There’s a fine balance between having security onsite at a hotel and invading guests’ personal space or causing concern,” said Christian Ryan, U.S. Hospitality and Gaming Practice leader, Marsh.

However, some believe that the latest incident, which claimed 59 lives, will spark a culture change. Guests may become more comfortable with and even expect armed guards and metal detectors. They may not mind having their bags scanned if they recognize it could prevent another attack.

Lance Ewing, EVP, Global Risk Management at Cotton Holdings Inc., said that Americans tend to see safety as a right and often take it for granted.

“People in other countries don’t necessarily take safety for granted. In some European, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries, hotels are already using armed guards and metal detectors. Some have bomb-sniffing dogs in the lobby. Some take your bags when you arrive, scan them and deliver them right to your room so you don’t even touch them once you enter the building,” he said.

“Are we ready for those measures in the U.S.?”

Ryan said that scanning luggage could be the “next evolution” of hotel security.



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Christian Ryan
U.S. Hospitality and Gaming Practice
Leader, Marsh

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“Some propositions are in the works for hotels to start scanning bags, though it’s not likely in the near future,” he said. “The public may demand some extra security in light of the events in Las Vegas, and there could be legislation down the road.”

Advanced technology like facial recognition software may also play a larger role in threat identification. So far, development of that technology has focused on making the travel experience more pleasant for hotel guests. Recognizing and keeping tabs on a guest tips the hotel off to his or her particular preferences — what type of drink does he like; what kind of amenities might she be interested in?

But it could also be used to “cross-reference databases to conduct background checks and look for criminal histories,” Ryan said. That could help to counteract the fact that express and mobile

check-in capabilities — also a product of technological advancement — reduce interaction between hotel staff and guests, making it tougher to spot suspicious behavior.

Of course, not every person looking to cause harm will have a criminal history, or at least not one that will raise red flags at the front desk.

Bo Mitchell, founder and president of 911 Consulting, said that often the perpetrators of mass shootings and other high-profile attacks “look like your uncle, your cousin, your sibling,” and that facial recognition software “can’t recognize crazy.”

“You can’t stop these attacks committed by unstable people. Your obligation is to respond to them,” he said.

Adoption of tougher security will depend on a hotel’s type, location, and clientele. Resorts and casinos that aim to entertain as much as to provide accommodation will draw larger crowds than simpler hotels that primarily serve business travelers, airport layovers or people en route to somewhere else.

Current Practices and Challenges

None of this should suggest, however, that hospitality companies haven’t already invested heavily in security and crisis management.



<http://riskandinsurance.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Bo-Mitchell-230x300.jpg>

Bo Mitchell, founder and president,
911 Consulting

“Safety and security have always been a linchpin of hospitality, and the majority of hotels are extremely safe places,” Ewing said.

Most security planning is and will continue to be focused on training staff to identify suspicious behavior and respond appropriately — though it may be kicked up a notch.

Housekeeping staff plays a key role in noticing anything suspicious in a guest’s room, including weapons, drugs, extra wires, signs of human trafficking, or an unusually large amount of luggage. They can also keep tabs on how long a guest has kept their ‘do not disturb’ sign on the doorknob.

“How long can someone leave up a ‘do not disturb’ sign? If they’re staying for a week and no one’s been in the room, that should be a red flag,” Ryan said.

Active shooter training is also a mainstay of hospitality risk management, and has been since Columbine put mass shooting on everyone’s radar.

“Chances are if someone notices something suspicious, other people have too. But you can’t put those pieces of the puzzle together if you haven’t trained employees to say something.” —
Michelle Colosimo, director, BlackSwan Solutions

High turnover rates make it difficult to get that training to stick, however, and hotels have to continually bring new employees up to speed. Ewing also noted that at some franchise hotels owned by flagship hospitality companies, training doesn’t always “trickle down” to the housekeeping and food and beverage staff as it should. Mitchell has also observed a lack of emergency training among hotels employees, even though such training is required by OSHA.

“The leadership level might know what to look for and what actions to take, but that needs to be pushed down through the ranks,” said Michelle Colosimo, director, BlackSwan Solutions. “And people need to be comfortable airing their concerns, without worrying if they’ll be perceived as overreacting or be retaliated against. Chances are if someone notices something suspicious, other people have too. But you can’t put those pieces of the puzzle together if you haven’t trained employees to say something.”

Hotels typically work closely with local police departments, who in many cases will provide active shooter training for free if requested, Marsh's Ryan said.

<http://riskandinsurance.com> **hotel** “The magnitude of people that come in and out of the casinos and Las Vegas requires a robust security force, and heads of security are in close contact with police,” he said.

Open carry laws that vary state by state have always posed a challenge, but could complicate security policies going forward.

What Lies Ahead

Las Vegas police have generally been credited with good instincts and fast response in locating the shooter on the 32nd floor. But other reports cite slow communication between hotel staff and officers. Could better planning have prevented loss of life?

“Security in some ways runs counter to the culture of a hotel. They want to embrace, nourish and nurture their guests. No one wants to think about bullets and bodies,” Mitchell said.

“Active shooter scenarios are not necessarily the types of events venues are preparing for. It's a risk you take on that you expect to be small, but that can have huge implications,” Black Swan's Colosimo said.

High profile locations with casinos and entertainment venues, or those close to concert halls, arenas, parades or other gathering places will need to expand their security scope to include non-traditional threats.

Hospitality companies can look to other sectors for lessons learned. Universities, for example, have been targeted in several shootings.

“They have the job of training students, staff and security police, but it's not invasive. You don't see armed guards standing at the entrance of every lecture hall. They've developed some best practices that could be introduced into the hospitality space,” Ryan said.

One of those best practices is a mass alert or notification system. Universities can notify students and staff of everything from a school closing to active shooter or shelter-in place situation via text message.



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Michelle Colosimo, director, Black Swan Solutions

Likewise, hotels could employ such a system to remind employees what to do in the event of an emergency – whether they should shelter-in-place or evacuate and where to go.

“You don’t think as clearly in a crisis situation as you do when you’re calm. Having that alert that tells you what to do or where to go can help you make a decision,” Colosimo said. “You can also segment those messages to send different communications specifically to your crisis response team if you want to. Managing your communication channels is key.”

Some industry experts compared upcoming changes in hospitality risk management to the response by airports after the 9/11 attacks. Security got noticeably tighter, and has become a fact of life. But the changes were not always made quickly, and it took time for the public to adjust.

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Collaboration at the Crossroads of Safety and Technology

Leveraging what new technology has to offer calls for greater collaboration on the job site.

By: The Hartford (<http://riskandinsurance.com/author/hartford/>) | October 3, 2017 • 7 min read



Rapid-fire advancements in technology can leave many business sectors with whiplash trying to keep up.

The construction industry, however, has largely been immune to tech disruption. The means and methods of erecting a building, bridge or any other structure have more or less remained the same over the years.

But change is on the horizon.

New technology — like building information modeling (BIM), wearables, and automated machinery — is growing more prevalent on job sites.

These modern tools promise to boost efficiency, help address the skilled labor shortage and ultimately keep workers safer. Construction remains, after all, one of the riskiest industries from a safety standpoint.

But new technology also presents new risks if not thoughtfully implemented. Project owners, contractors and workers all must understand how a piece of technology works and how it benefits every stakeholder for it to be effective.

To harness the promise of construction technology while minimizing its downsides, contractors and their insurers should adopt a collaborative approach to understand how new tools fit into a project's workflow, which encompasses everything from production processes and schedules to safety and risk management programs.

“Technology is changing the construction industry,” said Tom Boudreau, vice president of construction insurance for The Hartford

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“Without strong collaboration and understanding of a common goal, safety and a good work product can’t be accomplished.”

Technology Promise and Perils



Dennis Gardner, risk engineering director, The Hartford

Compared to traditional paper blueprints, BIM models provide a more detailed, interactive and 3D view of a project. Digitizing the plans has given way to more innovative building methods.

“With 3D BIM technology, we’re seeing much more off-site prefabrication being done in manufacturing warehouse environments,” said Dennis Gardner, risk engineering director, The Hartford. “This can reduce risk because much of the work is done at ground level, eliminating the need to put workers on ladders or in lifts.”

But getting pre-fabricated modules on-site creates unique challenges.

Pre-fabricated units that include interior designs should not be exposed to weather, which makes transporting, delivering and storing them risky. Collaboration is paramount to using these models effectively.

“In the past if your schedule was off by a day or two, there was typically a storage area for raw materials. But with a finished product that really should not be exposed to the elements, you have to be ready for when that unit arrives on site,” Boudreau said. “That requires a high level of coordination between the manufacturer and workers on site to keep schedules in sync.”

Wearables and GPS trackers similarly provide big safety benefits when workers and managers are on the same page.

A superintendent or foreman could, for example, apply geofencing to keep workers out of high hazard areas like elevated platforms if their work does not require them to be there. If a worker crosses the boundary, an alert may be sent directly to their wearable device, or to a safety manager on site. GPS tracking can also alert a manager to a worker’s location if they have fallen or otherwise injured themselves.

To some workers, though, wearing a tracking device can feel like Big Brother is watching, waiting to pin them for violating a safety protocol.

“Collaboration and communication is key to help contractors and laborers understand that the purpose of the technology is not to catch them doing something wrong, but to help them work safer and more efficiently,” Gardner said.

Automated and remote-controlled machinery can also improve safety by keeping workers away from high risk areas and activities.

“Semi-automated masonry machines can build a masonry wall semi-automatically with only minimal actual worker interface, reducing the risk of injury from material handling strains and injuries from falls,” Gardner said.

“Years ago if you were drilling in a quarry or on a construction project with a rock drill, the operator was standing right at the drill head operating the controls that applied the pressure, the rotational spin and the water control. Now that can be done remotely to eliminate the exposure to loud noise, the material handling of the heavy drill steel, and of course the exposure to silica.”

But any new machinery presents risks if handled improperly. The lack of labor skilled in operating new, high tech equipment — combined with inadequate training — exacerbate these risks.

Labor and Training Shortage

“The economic downturn really diminished the training resources offered by vocational schools and unions, which leads to less trained folks coming onto a job site. That’s a dangerous situation from a safety perspective and also from a product perspective,” Boudreau said.

Younger workers also tend to learn differently, utilizing technology where their veteran counterparts relied more on gaining hands-on experience in the field. Older workers, perhaps feeling threatened by the new technology or newer and younger workers coming onto the scene, are at times resistant to help train them.



Tom Boudreau, vice president of construction insurance for The Hartford

“We have been disappointed, in some cases, with the lack of willingness of some of the older generation to teach the new generation necessary skills,” Boudreau said. But where technology widens the divide between the young and the experienced, it can also provide a new training avenue.

“Some of the wearables show some promise in that they can remotely connect a less experienced person in the field with a more seasoned worker, who can help to troubleshoot whatever issue the trainee is encountering.” Gardner said. “In some cases, the wearable device can provide a live view of the situation at hand.”

GPS units, BIM models, and digitally automated equipment may also provide data on workflow processes and safety vulnerabilities. Gaining additional insight into these areas will likely prove critical as construction timetables further compress and the labor shortage persists.

“We have to shift to a proactive safety approach. We have to think about what risks we’ll face weeks or months ahead in the schedule.” — Dennis Gardner, risk engineering director, The Hartford

A Collaborative Approach

Leveraging what technology has to offer — from safer work sites to better data and increased efficiency —calls for collaboration on the job site.

This is where The Hartford’s dedicated construction risk engineering consultants take a leading role.

“We have to move from a traditional inspector role into more of a consultative role,” Gardner said. “We want to understand the dynamics of a company, their safety programs, and how they’re using automated tools or connected technology.”

Inspectors typically only spot point-in-time problems while they’re walking a job site. They don’t necessarily have insight into systemic issues that lead to safety shortfalls, or hazards the company may face in future phases of construction.

“Traditional inspection approaches are reactive and punitive. We have to shift to a proactive safety approach. We have to think about what risks we’ll face weeks or months ahead in the schedule,” Gardner said.

To help accomplish this proactive approach, The Hartford’s risk engineering consultants meet with contractors before a project even begins to identify phases of construction or periods in the schedule where risk may be highest. They discuss ahead of time what will be done to mitigate the risk, including evaluating the safety program. They can help project managers implement things like wearables if there is a desire to use them.

“The use of technology, especially the newer technology that’s been developed in the last decade, is eventually going to lead to much safer job sites,” Boudreau said. “But it all starts with a collaborative approach.”

For more on The Hartford’s construction offerings, visit

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